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TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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FOR AMBASSADOR MARSHALL GREEN FROM NELSON

FOLLOWING REPEAT NEW DELHI 1499 ACTION SECSTATE 30 JAN 76.

QUOTE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 1499

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SPOP, IN

SUBJECT: RENEWED HIGH LEVEL GOI CONCERN OVER POPULATION GROWTH

REF: NEW DELHI 1143

1. SUMMARY: AFTER AN EXTENDED LULL, THE PROBLEM OF INDIA'S POPULATION GROWTH HAS AGAIN BECOME A MATTER OF CONCERN AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS SPOKEN OF IT, AND HER POSITION HAS BEEN REFLECTED IN OTHER GOI AND CONGRESS PARTY ACTIONS. COINCIDENTALLY, TWO STATES HAVE FLOATED PROPOSALS AIMED AT REDUCING FAMILY SIZE. WHILE U.S. NEWSMEN HAVE EMPHASIZED THE ELEMENT OF COMPULSION THREATENED IN SOME STATEMENTS, WHAT THE GOI IS WORKING ON IS A POSSIBLE SCHEME OF INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL. ANY SCHEME WILL BE DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT AMONG RURAL POPULATION. END SUMMARY.

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2. CURRENT FLURRY OVER POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT'S POPULATION POLICY BEGAN IN LATE DECEMBER WHEN PRIME MINISTER GANDHI, ADDRESSING CONGRESS PARTY MEETING IN CHANDIGARH, CALLED ATTENTION TO NEED FOR GREATER SUCCESS IN REDUCING FAMILY SIZE. SHE URGED PARTY TO ADOPT LONG-STANDING GOVERNMENT GOALS OF FAMILY PLANNING AND LOWER BIRTHRATE AS PARTY PROGRAMS. SHE IS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID GOVERNMENT WAS CONSIDERING "STRONG MEASURES" IN POPULATION FIELD. MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING, KARAN SINGH, TOLD PARTY MEETING THAT GOVERNMENT WAS DEVELOPING "A PACKAGE OF INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES TO PROMOTE THE CONCEPT OF THE ENCOURAGE FAMILY PLANNING." HE REPORTEDLY SAID (SEE REFTEL) VOLUNTARY EFFORTS HAVE NOT GIVEN THE DESIRED RESULTS AND HIS REMARKS WERE INTERPRETED BY THE PRESS, TO IMPLY THAT AN ELEMENT OF COMPULSION WOULD BE INTRODUCED IN GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM.

. ECONOMIC RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY PARTY MEETING INCLUDED FOLLOWING REFERENCE TO POPULATION ISSUE: "THE PROGRAM OF FAMILY PLANNING HAS TO BE REVITALIZED SO AS TO GENERATE A NEW AWARENESS OF ITS IMPORTANT IN PROMOTING FAMILY WELFARE...BOLD AND NEW MEASURES COVERING INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES WILL HAVE TO BE DEVISED TO ACHIEVE THIS OBJECTIVE." THE THEME WAS REITERATED IN THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO THE OPENING SESSION OF PARLIAMENT JANUARY 5: "TO ACHIEVE THIS (REDUCTION IN BIRTHRATE), THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM WILL HAVE TO BECOME A MASS MOVEMENT. NEW SCHEMES OF INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES ARE BEING EVOLVED TO INCREASE THE ACCEPTANCE OF A SMALL FAMILY."

4. MINISTER KARAN SINGH SPOKE IN PARLIAMENT JANUARY 7, ONCE AGAIN STATING THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD "SOON FINALIZE" PACKAGE OF OF INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES. SCHOOL TEACHERS, VILLAGE COUNCILS, COOPERATIVES AND LABOR UNIONS WOULD BE INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM, HE SAID. HE SPECIFICALLY STATED, ACCORDING TO INDIAN WIRE SERVICE ACCOUNT, THAT SITUATION DID NOT CALL FOR LEGISLATIVE MEASURES TO MAKE THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM COMPULSORY. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE ADDED THAT "IF DISCIPLINE IS NOT SELF-INSPIRED, IT MAY HAVE TO BE IMPOSED" AND APPARENTLY SUGGESTED POSSIBILITY THAT STRONGER LAW MIGHT HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED IF CURRENT PROGRAMS FAILED. IT WAS THESE LATTER COMMENTS WHICH SPARKED STORIES FILED BY WASHINGTON POST AND NEW YORK TIMES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CORRESPONDENTS.

5. MRS. GANDHI RETURNED TO THIS ISSUE IN INTERVIEW WITH AGENCE FRANCE PRESSEE REPORTED IN INDIAN WIRE SERVICE STORY JANUARY 21. UHE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT HEALTH MCNISTRY HAD DEVELOPED SOME PROPOSALS AND THEY (PRESUMABLY THE CABINET) WERE GOING TO DISCUSS THEM. SHE IS QUOTED AS SAYING, "I DO NOT KNOW WHAT WILL BE ACCEPTED BY MY COLLEAGUES AND BY PARLIAMENT, BUT WE DO FEEL THAT SOME

DRASTIC ACTION HAS TO BE TAKEN AND IT CAN ONLY BE IN THE NATURE OF INCENTIVES TO THOSE WHO HAVE SMALLER FAMILIES AND DISINCENTIVES TO THOSE WHO HAVE LARGER FAMILIES."

6. SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH
CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS PRONOUNCEMENTS--AND
SERVING TO HEIGHTEN THEIR IMPACT--WAS PROSPECTIVE ACTION ANNOUNCED BY STATE GOVERNMENTS OF HARYANA AND PUNJAB. HARYANA PROGRAM WILL PROVIDE CASH AWARDS TO DISTRICTS, VILLAGES AND FACTORY UNIONS WHICH ACHIEVE CERTAIN BIRTH CONTROL ACCEPTANCE TARGETS. DISINCENTIVES FOR STATE EMPLOYEES ARE MORE RIGOROUS: "ONLY THOSE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES WILL BE ENTITLED TO PRIVILEGES (E.G. HOUSING, ALLOWANCES, LOANS) WHO ADOPT STERILIZATION AS A METHOD OF FAMILY PLANNING AFTER TWO LIVING CHILDREN." PROGRAM HAS NOT YET BEEN ENACTED AS LAW. PUNJAB GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED IT IS CONSIDERING PROGRAM OF DISINCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYEES ALONG SIMILAR LINES. (COMMENT: MAHARASHTRA STATE GOVERNMENT HAS HAD SUCH A PROGRAM IN ITS LEGISLATION SINCE 1967 BUT IT HAS NEVER BEEN IMPLEMENTED BECAUSE OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION. ACCORDING TO MINISTRY OF HEALTH OFFICIAL, IMPLEMENTATION OF HARYANA-STYLE PROGRAM AT STATE LEVEL WILL REQUIRE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT APPROVAL AND ENABLING LEGISLATION. HOWEVER AT THIS TIME THE HEALTH MINISTRY HAS CIRCULATED THE HARYANA PROPOSAL TO THE OTHER STATE GOVERNMENTS FOR THEIR CONSIDERATION.)

7. EDITORIAL COMMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS HAS GENERALLY OPPOSED COMPULSORY BIRTH CONTROL. IN LEAD EDITORIAL LAST NOVEMBER, NATIONAL HERALD (CONGRESS PARTY RELATED) SAID "GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT TOY WITH THE IDEA" OF COMPULSORY ENFORCEMENT OF FAMILY PLANNING. IT URGED REINVIGORATED PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN IN RURAL AREAS, SINCE "THE BUSINESS OF UNCHECKED OVERBREEDING, IF NOT CHECKED, WILL LEAD TO A NATIONAL DISASTER."

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8. COMMENT: THE RECENT PRESS HILLABALOO AND THE TOUGH SPEECHES BY THE PRIME MINISTER, HEALTH MINISTER AND OTHERS INCLUDE A LARGE DOSE OF SCARE TACTICS. THE HEALTH MINISTER ADMITTED AS MUCH IN HIS RECENT CONVERSATION WITH CEQ CHAIRMAN PETERSON (NEW DELHI 1143). GOI HAS NOT THOUGHT OUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF A COMPULSORY PROGRAM, OR EVEN HOW TO INITIATE A PROGRAM IN THE RURAL AREAS WHERE 80 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS LOCATED. DISINCENTIVES ARE MEANINGLESS FOR THE VILLAGES, WHERE IT IS ESTIMATED ONLY 15 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE ARE BEING REACHED BY ANY FAMILY PLANNING MESSAGE. LARGE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES, AS SUGGESTED BY THE MINISTER--FOR EXAMPLE UP TO RS. 200 FOR STERILIZATION--MIGHT PROVE WORKABLE AND OF SOME EFFECT.
SAXBE UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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